

Knights hold off Hawks, move into final of own tournament

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE – Metro East Lutheran had gotten out to a good halftime lead on Waterloo Gibault in Friday night's second semifinal game of the MEL Thanksgiving Turkey Tipoff Classic at Hooks Gym.

The second half, though...

“We did pretty well in the first half,” said Knight coach Anthony Smith. “The first half, we played some really good defense, did a lot of good things with the defensive effort. From there, the second half...we've got to find five guys who physically work at playing for the name on the front of the jersey; we've got to do away with the other stuff.”

The Knights grabbed a 26-13 lead on the Hawks at the half, but Gibault rallied to make it close in the second half before MEL held off Gibault 48-40 to move into Saturday night's tournament final against Marquette Catholic; that game is set for 7:30 p.m., preceded by the third-place game between the Hawks and Piasa Southwestern at 5:30 p. m.

MEL improved to 3-0 on the season with the win, while Gibault fell to 2-1.

“On paper, we're a really, really good ball club,” Smith said. “On the court...there's a lot going on out there; it's hard to watch because I know how talented we can be when guys

buy into the system. The defensive effort was great in the first half; the second half, we started doing things that were not conducive to what we're trying to do – we started giving up the middle, we started giving up layups.

“They got airballs, they got rebounds, they got putbacks; all of a sudden, I looked up and we're up by five. Credit to Gibault; Gibault's always going to be Gibault. They're never going to come in and you'll blow them out of the water, which I thought we might have a chance to do. In the second half, people started to do their own things and it went downhill from there.”

While Smith was happy with the win, he knew that if the Knights do the things he wasn't happy with against Marquette, it may well not be a pleasant experience for his team. “We won tonight, but if we play like that tomorrow, Marquette's going to beat us by 70,” Smith said.

The Knights certainly had things going their way in the first half before the Hawks rallied to cut the MEL lead to 40-37 with 2:32 left after a pair of three-balls from Logan Doerr; Gibault couldn't get any closer to that as the Knights got back to 45-37 ahead in the closing stages of the game.

DaMonte Bean had some key scores down the stretch to close the game with 17 points; Cooper Krone had 10 points for the Knights and Jason Williams added seven points for MEL; Gibault was led by Doerr's 18-point night, with Josh Besserman adding 12 points and Karson Huels seven points.

Following Saturday's final, the Knights host Lutheran North at 7:30 p.m. Thursday before opening their Prairie State Conference campaign at Marquette at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 5 in Alton.